

INTRODUCTION

The quality of life in a community cannot be measured by statistics. It can only be expressed in terms of the collective experiences enjoyed by the residents. It includes such things as a comfortable climate, recreational and entertainment opportunities, educational and cultural life, and an aesthetically pleasing living environment. York County is best defined by its quality of life. Mild temperatures, a low crime rate, hundreds of miles of coastline, and abundant flora and fauna contribute to the County's reputation as a pleasant place to live.

To preserve and enhance this high quality of life is the overriding purpose of the York County *Comprehensive Plan*, which is the long-range plan for the physical development of the County. Like all localities in Virginia, York County is required by Section 15.2-2223 of the *Code of Virginia* to adopt a comprehensive plan, but the reasons for developing the plan go well beyond fulfilling this mandate. The *Comprehensive Plan* is necessary to ensure the efficient use of land in recognition of environmental constraints and the capacity of the public infrastructure. It seeks to provide for an appropriate mix of residential, commercial, and industrial development; to guide such development to appropriate areas of the County based on the carrying capacity of the land, the existing development character, and the presence of infrastructure and public facilities; to preserve the County's natural and historic resources and aesthetic quality; and to prevent the overburdening of the County's roads, utilities, facilities, and services.

Although mandated by state law, a comprehensive plan does not have the status of law. Rather, it is a policy document intended to provide direction for present and future policy makers in making the laws and setting the policies to guide the County's development. The *Comprehensive Plan* is implemented by the County's various development ordinances – particularly the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances – as well as the Capital Improvements Program and the Six-Year Primary and Secondary Road Plans.

CHARTING THE COURSE TO 2010

On December 5, 1991 the York County Board of Supervisors adopted *Charting the Course to 2010: The County of York Comprehensive Plan*, which was the first true *Comprehensive Plan* in the County's history. Land use plans for the County had been developed in 1956 and 1964 by Virginia's Division of Industrial Development and Planning, and in 1967 by Harland Bartholomew and Associates. Although never formally adopted by the Board of Supervisors, these plans served as a basis for the development of land use controls until the adoption of a *Land Use Plan* in 1976. Subsequently, a *Schools Plan* (1978), *Major Thoroughfares Plan* (1979), and *Fire Protection Plan* (1979) were developed and adopted as elements of the comprehensive plan. A new *Land Use Plan* was developed in 1982 and adopted in 1983. Unlike previous plans, the 1983 plan was developed not by an outside consultant but by the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and County staff.

The 1991 plan was the product of over two years of work on the part of County planning staff, citizen volunteers, and elected and appointed officials. Public involvement was a key ingredient in the process, beginning in 1989 with the publication of a citizen questionnaire in the *Citizen News*, which is mailed to every home and business in the County. Four Comprehensive Plan Review committees were established and given responsibility for developing the various plan elements. A fifth committee was also created to coordinate all of the elements into a single unified plan. Citizen volunteers served on each of these committees, which also included members of the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, School Board, Industrial (now Economic) Development Authority, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. A staff liaison was assigned to each committee. Because of the County's special relationship to the water and the twenty-year horizon of the plan, "Charting the Course to 2010" was adopted as the plan's theme.

The committees went to work in February 1990, holding meetings, field trips, and work-sessions, which eventually numbered over 200. All of these meetings were open to the public, with meeting dates publicized on York County's cable channel, and several citizens regularly attended and participated. Two series of town meetings were conducted, first in May 1990 to invite the citizens to give the committees direction and again in May 1991 to present the draft recommendations to the citizens and get their reaction. The citizens' comments were then incorporated into the final plan where appropriate. The final product, *Charting the Course to 2010*, was adopted in December 1991 and was recognized in 1993 by the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association with its "Distinguished Professional Planning Project" award.

CHARTING THE COURSE TO 2015

Following the adoption of the *Comprehensive Plan*, the County's Zoning Ordinance underwent a thorough review by staff, the Planning Commission, an ad hoc Zoning Ordinance Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of this effort was to revise the zoning regulations where necessary to implement the policies and land use designations set forth in the plan, and the results were a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map, adopted in June 1995.

Section 15.2-2230 of the *Code of Virginia* requires localities to review and if necessary update their comprehensive plans at least once every five years. After the plan's adoption in 1991, the Board of Supervisors adopted amendments to the *Comprehensive Plan* to update the school enrollment and capacity figures as well as to incorporate the *Regional Bikeways Plan*, the *Yorktown Master Plan*, and the *County Sidewalk Plan*. The first comprehensive review of the entire plan began in 1996 with an extensive public input process that was recognized with an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo) in 1997. The review process was led by a 16-member citizens review committee and culminated in the Board of Supervisors' adoption of the updated plan, titled *Charting the Course to 2015*, on October 6, 1999.

CHARTING THE COURSE TO 2025

Since the 1999 *Comprehensive Plan* was merely an update of the existing plan and, unlike the 1991 plan, did not recommend significant changes in policy, its adoption did not require major revisions to the development ordinances. However, the plan was amended in 2001 for compliance with the provisions of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. A minor amendment was also made in 2002 to change the land use designation of various properties in Lackey to recognize the potential for the wider range of business that might be attracted to the area because of the Federal HUBZone designation that applies to Lackey and the surrounding census tract. In 2004, about 4½ years after the adoption of the 1999 plan, the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission formed a Steering Committee to oversee the process of reviewing and updating the plan and a 38-member Communications and Outreach Group to assist the Steering Committee and staff in promoting and publicizing the *Comprehensive Plan* review and the various opportunities for citizen input.

The process of reviewing the plan began in July 2004 and citizen outreach was initiated in September with a series of fifteen Neighborhood Open Houses conducted all across the County, the purpose of which was to give County residents and property owners an opportunity to review the designations and policies expressed in the current plan and offer comments to the Steering Committee and staff. At the conclusion of the Neighborhood Open Houses, the Steering Committee began a comprehensive review of data relating to trends of growth and development, demographic change, and information on a wide range of topics corresponding to the subject areas addressed in the various *Comprehensive Plan* elements.

In January 2005, while this review was taking place, a telephone survey of County residents was conducted to help the Steering Committee identify the goals and priorities that should guide

County plans for the next 20 years. Questions on the survey were developed by the Steering Committee and staff, with assistance from a professional survey research firm, Continental Research Associates, Inc. The interviews were also conducted by Continental Research, which used statistically valid sampling methods to ensure a random survey sample that would be representative of the County population; the margin of error is $\pm 4.9\%$. The survey results, along with the various oral and written comments and suggestions received from the citizens through the various public input opportunities that were available, provided valuable insight to the Steering Committee as it endeavored to identify the plan goals, objectives, and implementation strategies.

After receiving the survey results, the Steering Committee continued its deliberations through July 2005, meeting with various citizens groups and property owners interested in presenting their ideas and suggestions for the plan. During this time, the Committee also reviewed, discussed, and revised draft plan elements prepared by the staff. This included a thorough review of the 2025 Land Use Map, which was the exclusive subject of four separate meetings and was also discussed at several additional meetings. The Steering Committee approved the draft plan on July 20, 2005, and forwarded it to the Planning Commission for its review. By the time it had completed its yearlong task, the Steering Committee had held 24 meetings, devoting a cumulative total of 325 volunteer hours to this project. This does not include the 15 Neighborhood Open Houses, which represented an additional commitment of several hundred volunteer hours.

The Planning Commission reviewed the draft plan update from late July through mid-September, holding a work session on August 3 and a public hearing on August 24 at which 17 people spoke. In addition, many other comments were received via mail, email, telephone, and in person. Citizen comments were incorporated into the plan where appropriate, and the Planning Commission officially certified the draft plan on September 14 and transmitted it to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation of adoption.

The Board of Supervisors conducted a public hearing on October 25 to receive public comment on the draft plan. Letters were mailed to all 402 owners of property that was being considered for a change in land use designation, and the Board received additional public comment at its November 15 meeting. In all, comments were received from about 74 citizens and non-resident property owners. In addition to the opportunities for public comment, the Board held three work sessions to review, discuss, and revise the draft updated plan before officially adopting it on December 6, 2005.

Like the 1991 plan, the updated plan is divided into chapters or *elements* dealing with various aspects of the County's physical development: community facilities, economic development, environment, historic resources, housing, transportation, and land use. There are also an Introduction, a Glossary, and chapters dealing with demographics and the citizen input that was collected in the preparation of this plan. The elements are ordered alphabetically except for the Land Use element, which is presented last since it incorporates information from all the other elements. Each plan element consists of a brief introduction followed by a summary of existing conditions and trends, a section summarizing the citizen input pertaining to that element, and an analysis of the County's present and future needs. Each element then concludes with a series of recommendations divided into a broad goal, more specific objectives, and implementation strategies for achieving those objectives.

The updated *Comprehensive Plan*, like the original 1991 plan and the 1999 update, represents the combined efforts of York County's citizens, elected and appointed officials, and staff to analyze present conditions in the County, identify present and future needs, and devise strategies for meeting these needs consistent with shared community goals and objectives. It is the County's vision for its future, specific enough to provide clear guidance to present and future policy makers yet broad and flexible enough to be adapted to account for changing circumstances.

